

AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political Science 355
Northern Illinois University

Spring 2018
MW 9:30-10:45am

day breakin
sun comin up
the bird in the tre soun like a blu bird
- Ernest Gaines

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the course and to African American Political Thought

SLAVE NARRATIVES AND POETRY

Introduction, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, excerpt **
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) *
Jacobs; Slave spirituals **

FOUNDING THEORISTS

Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901), excerpts, in *Three Negro Classics* *
W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), excerpts, in *Three Negro Classics* *
Marcus Garvey, "Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem" (1924),
Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again" (1935) **
James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones* (1927) *
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) *

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND CRITICS

Bayard Rustin, "Non-Violence v. Jim Crow" (1942), and Rustin, "Protest to Politics" (1965) **
Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), "Eulogy for the Martyred Children" (1963), **
Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964) **; Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation" (1966)
Martin Luther King, Jr., "Next Stop: The North" (1965), "Showdown for Nonviolence" (1968)
Freedom songs ##
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963) *;
Fannie Lou Hamer, "[Testimony to the Democratic National Committee](#)" (1964) **

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) *
Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993), selections **;
Barack Obama, "[Remarks on the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches](#)" (2015); and Obama, "[Charleston Eulogy](#)" (2016) **

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

African American Political Thought is a tradition of thinking about communal life whose proponents both claim and challenge American political thought more broadly. Our goal in this course is to understand the development of African American Political Thought. We will examine conflicts within the tradition, along with the tension the tradition holds with American political thought. Thinkers in this tradition develop their work in many forms, including narrative, treatise, speech, essay, poetry, story, and song.

In particular, we will attend to politically significant themes such as exile, the meaning of education, personhood, and protest. Importantly, we will give special consideration to each thinker's evaluation of the American Founding. We approach these themes by a chronological journey through the texts. We begin with slave narratives. Next, we move to founding theorists of race relations in America. With these roots in mind, we examine the development of the Civil Rights Movement and its critics. Finally, we close our study with the contributions of contemporary commentators.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Midterm Exam	30 %
Final Exam	30 %
Essay	30 %
Quality of Contribution	10 %

NIU has a plus/minus grading scale for final course grades. Your course grade is based on an essay (30%), a midterm exam (20%), a final exam (30%), and the quality of your contributions in the course (10%). I will provide further instruction on the expectations for writing. Late material will be penalized.

PRESENCE, READING, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Your success in this class depends upon your consistent presence, participation, and integrity. College is about challenging yourself to learn, to think about what matters and about who you want to be. Those are difficult tasks, but tasks more than worth the effort. University life requires us to prepare, to think, and to be present. Presence is about much more than simply showing up to class. It is about sharing in the task of understanding and analysis. That said, showing up to class is an important prerequisite for success. Your classmates, and you, depend on your presence for success in university life.

Grading Scale

A+ = 97-100
A = 93-96
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76
C- = 70-72
D+ = 67-69
D = 63-66
D- = 60-62
F = <60

Before each class period, you should read the assigned materials and thoughtfully consider their significance for our study. Our task is to read sympathetically in order to read critically—that is, to understand what each author is asking and arguing, and then to thoughtfully evaluate the work. Of course, you should bring your copy of the text to class. I will post a **weekly reading schedule** on Blackboard.

In university, all you have is your integrity. All forms of cheating, including plagiarism, harm both the person who commits the offense and the class as a whole. I expect you to show integrity; there is no other way to accomplish what we are here to do. Those who fail this standard should expect to face themselves, and meet appropriate consequences. Familiarize yourself with the NIU Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.niu.edu/conduct/student-code-of-conduct/>) for guidelines.

CONDUCT AND ELECTRONICS IN CLASS

Class time is set apart for a special purpose. Your aim is to respect others in word and in deed. **The use of laptops, tablets, and smart phones is *not* allowed in class**, except when approved for official note-takers. When you use pen and paper, you avoid the distractions a laptop would present to you and your neighbor. In addition, studies show that using pen and paper improves your ability to learn. You may not record this class without permission.

BLACKBOARD

Login to Blackboard through your myNIU account to access readings and other course materials (posted as PDF files or Internet links) as well as your grades.

RESOURCES

Office Hours. These are for you. Email to arrange a time.

Group Study. I encourage you to organize your own group study, as it facilitates your understanding of the material and challenges you to think about the major questions and arguments of the texts.

University Writing Center. For tutoring in writing, schedule: <http://www.niu.edu/uwc/>.

Students with Disabilities. Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center. Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center if they have not done so already. The Disability Resource Center is located on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 [v] or 815-753-3000 [TTY] or by email at drc@niu.edu.

Department of Political Science Website. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>.

REQUIRED TEXTS

** Students should print the selections marked on syllabus with a double asterisk from Moodle.

* Students should purchase the following books (available at the NIU bookstore and through online retailer such as Amazon, AbeBooks, etc.).

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Dover Thrift, 2001
ISBN 0486419312

Johnson, DuBois, Washington, *Three Negro Classics*, Avon, 1999
ISBN 978-0380015818

James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones*, Penguin Classics, 2008
ISBN 978-0143105411

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Harper Perennial, 2006
ISBN 978-0061120060

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, Vintage, 1992
ISBN 978-0679744726

Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*, Vintage 1994
ISBN 978-0375702709